

Images of alcoholism among adolescents in individualistic and collectivistic geographies

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ABSTRACT

AIM – This article compares adolescents' images of alcoholism in two different drinking geographies, namely Helsinki (Finland) and Turin (Italy), with the aim to better understand the persisting variance in youth drinking within Europe. **DESIGN** – Altogether 28 focus group interviews were conducted at schools among 15-year-old pupils (N=145). To assure reliable qualitative comparison across language boundaries, we applied a structured qualitative focus-group methodology called the Reception Analytical Group Interview (RAGI). **CONCLUSIONS** – Collectivist images of alcoholism can be considered more protective in terms of alcohol-related risk behaviour as they 1) emphasise interpersonal responsibility, 2) enhance the value of norms and traditions, and 3) highlight causes of alcoholism which are beyond the control of the individual (that is, contextual, social and inherent in the substance), making the attitude towards alcohol more cautious. A greater emphasis on the individual competence may correspondingly result in a lower perception about the risks of drinking.

KEYWORDS – Young people, Italy, Finland, drinking cultures, collectivism, individualism, geographies, alcoholism

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Introduction

In many countries young people's alcohol consumption is a matter of great concern and a target of preventive measures. Despite these worries and controlling measures, drinking remains an important part of the maturation process from childhood to adulthood in many European countries (Järvinen & Room, 2007). As young people's drinking cultures are changing, it has become especially relevant to consider the reasoning and understandings behind young people's alcohol use (Bogren, 2006). Several qualitative studies have explored social meanings and functions of alcohol use among young people, also considering cultural differences (Pyörälä, 1995; Kloep

et al., 2001), but there is less research on how young people understand substance-use related problems, how they perceive the boundary between safe and risky or acceptable and problematic drinking, and, especially, how these conceptualisations vary between countries. In this article, we use two local contexts, Turin, Italy, and Helsinki, Finland, as examples of southern and northern drinking geographies.

Previous research has suggested a convergent trend in youth drinking cultures. Some measures indicate that young people's drinking behaviour seems to become more similar within European countries: binge drinking, for example, has increased

in southern Europe and decreased in the north. While such data suggests a convergence process (Bjarnason, 2010; Ahlström and Österberg, 2005), other features still show differences. Certain features continue to point to a traditional division of “wet” southern and “dry” northern drinking cultures (Beccaria & Prina, 1996; Room, 1989; Järvinen & Room, 2007). Apparent contradictions also emerge in the most recent comparative survey on young people’s drinking (Hibell et al., 2013). Sixteen-year-olds both in Italy and in Finland prefer beer over other beverages, and the frequency of self-reported binge drinking is the same, yet consumed quantities during the last drinking occasion are very much lower in Italy (Hibell et al., 2013). Italian and Finnish young people also have very different expectations about the consequences of drinking. Italian youth find these consequences rather negative, whereas Finns tend to view them in positive terms. Thus, the main difference between the two countries can be still read as a greater Nordic propensity of risk-taking behaviour also among young people (e.g. in terms of intended drunkenness) (Järvinen & Room, 2007).

What do these differences mean? What kind of conceptualisations do they entail? Based on what we know from qualitative research, alcohol still occupies a different position in the two countries (Beccaria et al., 2010). For example, the alcohol-related socialisation process is associated with differing parental practices and meanings of alcohol (Beccaria et al., 2010; Rolando et al., 2012). In Italy, the first memories of alcohol consumption are commonly associated with positive values, such as family, tradition and togetherness. The first drink-

ing experiences usually occur within the family at an early age and with the parents’ consent. The first memories of alcohol in Finland, on the other hand, are typically ambivalent and less coherent, referring to both pleasant moments within the family but also to fear and excitement aroused by alcoholics met in public places. Differently from Italy, the first drinking experiences in Finland occur typically with peers without adults’ permission. These features indicate very different meanings of drinking: something ordinary in Italy and more “transgressive” in Finland (see also Järvinen & Room, 2007).

Our aim in this study is to go beyond the concept of drinking cultures and consider the wider perspective of cultural factors underpinning the meanings of drinking. By *drinking geographies* (Sulkunen, 2013) we mean sociocultural systems with specific drinking traditions which are not necessarily limited to national boundaries. The assumption is that in order to understand the differing meanings of alcohol use, we need to look beyond both national boundaries and specific alcohol-related issues, such as alcohol policies and traditional drinking patterns, and consider aspects that can be thought as “more permanent cultural deep structures” (Sulkunen, 2013). In this article we utilise a specific feature of geography, a collectivistic-individualistic cultural pattern (Dwairy, 2002) to understand why cultural differences in drinking still persist in a globalised era (Room, 2010), when new spaces of youth cultures and identities have been created and shared by western European young people (Lalander, 2003).

Understanding young people’s images of alcoholism is important, as these im-

ages affect the ways in which young people understand harmful consequences of drinking. Alcoholism, as a synonym for alcohol dependence, has its physiological components, but in everyday reasoning it can be used as a frame to explain and classify people's drinking-related behaviour (Alasuutari, 1992). In cultural studies on alcoholism and other addictions and their lay conceptualisations, the aim is not to reveal the "true" nature of the phenomenon but to show how conceptualisations are bound up with cultural and social contexts and how they are used to make everyday observations of problematic behaviour intelligible. This study, then, aims to answer the following questions: how do teenagers in two different drinking geographies perceive the pathways leading to alcoholism? Do the understandings of alcoholism follow the pattern of individualistic and collectivistic reasoning?

Theoretical framework

Developing the insights from previous studies (Hellman et al., 2010; Hellman & Rolando, 2013), we examine if teenagers' *images* (Sulkunen, 2002) of alcoholism in southern and northern drinking geographies follow the characters of individualistic and collectivistic (I-C) sociocultural patterns. The concept of images refers to the embodied and culturally embedded classifications, explanations and interpretations that people are not fully aware of but through which they make sense of the world around them. Images have a regulative function as they organise people's experiences and indicate what is acceptable and what is not in a given situation. Thus, though images are not necessarily based on direct experiences, they condition and

are conditioned by behaviour (Rantala & Sulkunen, 2012).

The framework of individualistic and collectivistic socio-cultural patterns has already been shown to be valuable in terms of understanding and comparing teenagers' meaning making of alcohol in Italy and Finland (Hellman et al., 2010; Hellman & Rolando, 2013). It seems that in Italy, drinking competence is defined according to the social context and others' expectations, while in Finland the competence of the drinker is much more referred to in terms of individual desires and self-achievement. The I-C conceptualisation has been developed in different research fields using different measurements, and for this reason it is important to realise that the concepts of collectivism and individualism should not necessarily be conceptualised as opposing or even as a single dimension (Realo & Allik, 1999), but rather there are elements of both individualism and collectivism in any culture (Triandis, 1995).

In our study, following Dwairy's suggestion (2002), we refer to I-C cultures in reference to personality – which "is not only influenced by culture but is thoroughly culturally constituted" (p. 348) – and the degree of individuation from the family. We define an individualistic culture as a sociocultural system in which individuals are expected to develop an independent personality, whereas individuals in a collectivistic culture are more encouraged to follow norms, values, roles and familial authority. I-C studies attribute to the "collectivistic personality", mostly understood as a trait or a type, different needs (orientations towards collective goals rather than individual ones), emotions (more

other-focused than ego-focused), values (interpersonal responsibilities are more emphasised than justice and individual rights) and social behaviour (more situational and contextual rather than dispositional) (Dwairy, 2002; Triandis, 1995).

Other aspects of this conceptualisation, particularly suitable for youth studies, are detectable in other studies. For instance, in relation to family processes and autonomy, a southern and a northern cluster have been identified in Europe in accordance with the different propensities of young people to leave home (Iacovu, 2002). Also the conceptualisations of autonomy and identity individuation seem to differ: in the Mediterranean countries they are expected to be achieved “within the family”, while in the Northern countries they coincide with the physical separation from parents (Van de Valde, 2002).

Thinking in these terms, Italy can be seen as an example of a collectivistic cultural pattern and, particularly, as an example of “family-related collectivism” or “familism” (Realo, Allik, & Vadi, 1997; Realo & Allik, 1999), in which respect for parents and traditions is considered an important value and guiding principle for most people (see e.g. Perussia & Viano, 2009). This aspect is also confirmed by Italian youth studies, which argue that family still plays a big role as socialising agent and transmitter of values, and represents, even for the new generations, a strong affective and normative bond (Garelli, Palmonari, & Sciollo, 2006).

Even if the strong welfare state is often interpreted as an expression of collectivism, Finland shows many tendencies of an individualistic cultural pattern, with more focus on such values as independ-

ence, achievement and freedom (Hellman et al., 2010). These individualistic aspects have emerged also in several addictions studies (Sulkunen, 2013). For instance, a study on cultural understandings of problematic gambling in Finland and France shows that Finns are more likely to attribute individual responsibility to problematic gambling, while among the French the role of the individual is considered marginal and the causes are more attributed to situational characteristics and the government (Pöysti & Majamäki, 2013). According to Sulkunen (2013), popular perceptions about the causes of addiction in Finland emphasise individual responsibility, whereas the effects of the social environment and living conditions are less considered (also Hirschovits-Gerz, 2013). Such results would also imply differing perceptions of drinking-related risks in different geographies. For instance, young Finns show a lower perception about the risks of drinking than their southern co-evals (Järvinen & Room, 2007).

Method, sample and analysis

The data were collected by utilising the Reception Analytical Group Interview method (RAGI), which is based on the theory of images and makes it possible to analyse teenagers’ own definitions and understandings of alcohol-related problems (Sulkunen & Egerer, 2009). The method uses film clips as stimuli in order to give as much freedom as possible to the respondents to raise their interpretations by avoiding direct and personal questions. In addition, it aims to improve the comparability of qualitative research by minimising the influence of the groups’ moderator. Indeed, the technique moves the focus of the interview from the

Table 1. Clips description

<i>Mean Creek (USA 2005)</i>	Male teenagers are drinking on a boat. One of them pushes the youngest one (about 12 years old) to taste a can of beer.
<i>Fucking Åmål (SWE 1998)</i>	In a private party a teenager girl disappointed in love drinks from the bottle and throws up.
<i>My Summer of Love (UK 2004)</i>	A teenage girl is taking a bath while drinking and smoking.
<i>Fjorton Suger (SWE 2004)</i>	Two 14-year-old girls drink and then sing and dance on the bed in a bedroom.
<i>Krampack (SPA 2002)</i>	At dinner a boy of about 18 years of age is invited by an adult to take a glass of wine.
<i>Eurotrip (USA 2004)</i>	A group of friends (young adults) are drinking and dancing in a disco.

interaction between interviewer and interviewees to an interaction on video and its interpretation where the stimulus takes the role of the subject (Törrönen, 2002). Moreover, the RAGI method fosters collective meaning making, because interpretations are not simply subjective but rather inter-subjective and result from negotiations and inter-comparisons.

The use of stimuli gives some advantages both in addiction research and youth studies, as it recalls moments and events that are external to the present situation without inhibiting the interviewees by posing direct questions to them. Young respondents do not necessarily need to discuss their own experiences with alcohol, which may be difficult when there are adults present in the situation. Moreover, respondents who are not familiar with alcohol are able to participate in the discussion, as they can talk about other people's behaviour, in this case about the characters in the film clips.

In the first phase of the RAGI method, a selection of film clips is chosen by the researchers, based on the aims of the re-

search. In our research, we wanted to include images related to a variety of different situations and social settings of drinking, as well as different drinking practices (such as binge drinking or drinking with a meal). Altogether six video clips were selected and shown, representing young people drinking in different situations.

The clips were shown to the interviewees in order to evoke their images and to observe their interpretive processes and reactions. Interviewees were asked to talk to each other freely about what they had seen in the clips, but also to address the support questions (Table 2).

Altogether 28 mixed-gender focus groups were conducted with 145 pupils aged 15 to 16 in Turin (Italy) and Helsinki (Finland). This particular age span was chosen as it represents an age when young people are familiarising themselves with drinking. At this stage their drinking images are influenced by their parents and wider socio-cultural contexts rather than their own experiences, which makes their views an especially interesting subject of cultural studies on addiction. Also, risks

Table 2. Written questions provided during the FGs

- | |
|---|
| 1. Please describe what happens in the scene and what kind of persons appear in it. |
| 2. What do you think may have happened before this event? |
| 3. Imagine what may happen immediately after this scene. |
| 4. Please describe how the same person or persons appear ten years later. |
| 5. In your opinion, can something like this happen in real life? |

perceived at this age are likely to affect their experimentations with alcohol.

In both countries schools were selected to reach pupils from different sociocultural contexts in order to avoid getting a socio-economically biased sample of young people but also to detect possible variances in the data with regard to socioeconomic background. However, in this article we concentrate on the differences between the drinking geographies. The Italian schools were selected on the basis of both the curriculum (vocational school/lyceum) and the location (centre/suburban neighbourhood). In Finland, the schools were selected on the basis of socioeconomic area indicators, such as educational level and the level of income in the neighbourhood. Randomly selected pupils and two reserves for each group were asked to participate through a personal mail asking them to fill in and return the signed informed consent as well the parents' consent. Each interview lasted from 40 minutes to about one hour and a half and they have been transcribed verbatim. The sample is composed as shown in Table 3.

In the data analysis we applied an ab-

ductive approach (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), in which the first stage was to code the material with Atlas.ti qualitative software with respect to the themes introduced by the interviewees and on the basis of the support questions that guided the discussions. Researchers defined and shared a common language to refer to interviewees' discourses, and the same codes were designed to highlight alcoholism and addiction-related themes in both data. Codes were grouped in "families" referring to the main topics: persons (characters showed in the clips), reasons (for drinking), risks (of drinking), and regulation (of drinking). We analysed selected quotations dealing with alcoholism – an alcoholic's characteristics, reasons behind alcoholism, risk of becoming an alcoholic and regulation in order to avoid alcoholism – as indicated in Table 4 with the number of individuated and analysed quotations. Quotations were intended as semantic units depicting the alcoholic/sm with a specific connotation, and as possibly overlapping. Each text portion could hence be quoted as referring to more than one code. In most cases quotations cover entire discussion sequences

Table 3. Sample

<i>Italian sample (Turin)</i>	<i>Finnish sample (Helsinki)</i>
10 FGs	18 FGs
59 pupils (29 males/30 females)	89 pupils (40 males/49 females)
4 schools	6 schools

Table 4. List of codes

<i>Italian coding list</i>	<i>Finnish coding list</i>
Person: alcoholic (14)	Person: alcoholic (19)
Reasons [<i>for drinking</i>]: addiction (12)	Reasons [<i>for drinking</i>]: addiction (4)
Risk: alcoholism (32)	Risk: alcoholism (36)
Regulation: addiction (33)	Regulation: addiction (4)

with a variety of voices and subjects (while citations quoted in the article are selected parts of them).

After the discussions about the findings between the authors, the next stage of the analysis was more theory-driven and concentrated on data interpretation in view of collectivistic and individualistic patterns. Throughout the analysis, the hypothesis and interpretations have been exchanged between the two authors, with the possibility of coming back to the quotations, in a perspective of recursion and reflexivity.

Results: Pathways to alcoholism

In both countries discussions about alcoholism appeared spontaneously, even if none of the clips was clearly about alcoholism or problematic drinking. Often, discussion about alcoholism started while reasoning what would happen to the characters ten years later. Both Italian and Finnish interviewees proposed two options: either the character would become a “normal person” or an alcoholic:

GR05_IT_LOW

M2: In my opinion the boys will continue to drink and be ruined, but it is also possible that they will have their heads screwed on, will get married, not being alone, just in a normal way...
[clip: mean creek]

GR02_FIN_UP

M5: And about what is going to happen to those characters in ten years is that probably most of them are just normal people who go to work.

M3: Yeah.

M1: They are probably grown out from that phase of life, at least most of them.

M3: Probably they'll be just normal adults.

[clip: fucking åmål]

In young people' understandings an alcoholic is an abnormal person who has failed to fulfil the expectations of adulthood. Differences come with the images of what normal adulthood is about. For Italians, images of a “normal adult” referred to getting a job, marrying and starting a family, while an alcoholic was described as a lonely person unable to stop drinking, one not economically nor emotionally accomplished. In Finland, a successful career or at least having a job were seen as indicators of normality and understood as a regular path toward adulthood. There were no mentions of family. All in all, the descriptions of normal adulthood and related achievements seemed to follow the distinction between a collectivistic and individualistic pattern, so that in Italy alcoholism was seen as something that primarily prevents one from starting a family, whereas in Finland it represents an obstacle to personal careers.

In the focus groups (FGs), several images of alcoholism emerged which covered different aspects of the phenomenon and depicted different pathways that could lead a person to becoming an alcoholic. We shall describe these images some of which came out in both data – although not exactly in the same way – while others did not. Quotations that are used as examples represent the most typical discourses that emerged in the two contexts, even if there were also divergent opinions between interviewees.

Frequent drinking/drunkenness

In both data, interviewees saw in the clips many behavioural characteristics that were interpreted as signs of risks of future alcoholism. In both countries *frequent drinking* was considered a risk. Italian interviewees often named the onset of the problem as “taking up a vice”, using a traditional expression with a moral connotation (*prendere il vizio*). Almost all drinking practices presented in the clips were seen as containing a risk of alcoholism if they were frequently repeated:

GR03_IT_UP

F2: Maybe the characters in the scene would change, because growing up they would understand they are wrong to do it always, but maybe others will keep on and will be damaged... It depends if you get engaged in the situation, you get intoxicated maybe once, because you are with friends and are fooling around, but if it happens always...

M1: [you are] an alcoholic

F2: indeed, as far as I know, after a while [alcohol] is addictive, so that if in the beginning you drink and some-

times get drunk, and sometimes you can be stupid... [it's fine], but if you always do it's dangerous
[clip: fucking åmål]

Compared to the Finnish interviewees, Italians stressed the risk of frequent drunkenness rather than of frequent drinking. Indeed, although the Italian interviewees agreed that drinking repeatedly could lead to alcoholism, in the discussions about drinking during meals – or about allowing teenagers to drink during meals – there was less agreement. From one point of view, daily drinking can be considered a bad habit, but from the other, drinking wine and eating was seen as quite a different way of drinking and considered almost healthy, even if the interviewees joked about it. In their opinion the context determines if frequent drinking is to be considered a risk or not.

GR04_IT_LOW

F2: when you drink while eating then you get the vice, if you do it almost every evening, then you take up the vice.

F5: maybe it was just occasional, [while they were] talking.

M3: but a glass of wine is good!

F1: that's true, a glass of wine...

F2: ...keeps the doctor away! [LAUGHING] A glass of vodka keeps the doctor away!

[clip: krampack]

In their images of risks of frequent drinking, Finnish teenagers did not differentiate between differing drinking situations, but frequent drinking as such was seen as a risk.

GR07_FIN_LOW

M3: How are the characters in ten years? How should I know...

F2: Alkies.

M3: Come on, they certainly won't become alkies.

M4: Really won't.

M5: If they drink, it doesn't mean that they are alkies.

F2: But how can you be certain that they drink only this once?

M3: Well no but...

M5: Yeah you don't know. We just saw one clip.

[clip: mean creek]

Drinking spirits

As Italians differentiated between practices of daily drinking, they also considered the specific role of different beverages in the process of getting addicted. Differently from wine, drinking spirits was related to addiction and described with concepts such as craving and relapse. Also, differently to drinking wine or beer, drinking spirits was often considered drinking with a purpose to get intoxicated.

GR04_IT_UP

M1: Even if she loses the vice of drinking, as you drink once – obviously not a glass of wine or what the fuck do I know – but when you drink spirits or whatever, you fall in it again immediately. In the end, the smoking addiction takes a lot more willpower, but you really can stop the bond that binds you with cigarettes, the case of alcohol is much more difficult, even impossible.

[clip: my summer of love]

Spirits were seen as drinks for “*professionals*” by Finns as well: drinking vodka was interpreted as a sign of current problem drinking. However, Finnish interviewees also used this interpretation humorously by referring to their own drinking and thus expressing their own experience.

GR06_FIN_UP

P6: Drinking games are fucking hilarious!

P4: Yeah, who empties a one-litre vodka bottle first.

P6: Noo.... It's like “take one, take two”, it goes like that.

P4: Or then you could have added a video from YouTube where the guy opens a vodka bottle and drinks it in 17 or 18 seconds.

[discussion at the end of the session, not related to any of the clips]

Finns thus had an ambivalent image of spirits: they were associated with “serious” and risky drinking, but at the same time spirits were seen as a source for showing off one's competence and ability to tolerate large amounts of alcohol. Interestingly, in the Italian quote spirits are paralleled with smoking, since they both lead to addiction that is almost impossible to defeat (GR_04_IT_UP). Italian interviewees seemed to be aware that alcohol – spirits actually, since often in Italy this term is not related to wine or beer – is an addictive substance, even if, as we shall see, the real “source” of addiction is not in the alcohol itself. In the Finnish data, drinking spirits was related to alcoholism but there was no discussion on differences in the addictive power. Instead the risk of alcoholism was discussed in relation to other factors.

Drinking alone

In both countries the clip from the movie *My Summer of Love* was considered to represent the most risky kind of drinking. In the clip, a girl is taking a bath while drinking beer and smoking. In the data, the character was most often described as a potential alcoholic or as a person already suffering from alcoholism. The main reason for this was that the girl was drinking alone:

GR04_IT_UP

F4: [...] in my opinion somebody becomes totally dependent when they drinks alone, because if you do it in a group it's to be seen by others or to have fun, but when you start to do it alone, when there's nobody else and you are completely alone, then you're addicted.

M5: Well, maybe if you're alone you can also get into mischief.

F4: No, it happens with friends.

[clip: my summer of love]

GR12_FIN_LOW

F6: She was boozing alone at home.

F8: And had a cigarette.

[...]

F5: She's likely to become an alcoholic when she's older.

F6: Or maybe she already is.

[clip: my summer of love]

Drinking alone was considered the most dangerous consumption pattern in relation to getting addicted. The character's behaviour has already crossed the boundaries of normal, acceptable drinking. Drinking alone is so far from the young peoples' experiences that they can attribute it only to adults. For the same reason, the girl was

often interpreted as being older than the characters in the other clips, both by Italian and by Finnish interviewees.

Drinking for sadness vs. drinking for fun

Interviewees in both countries discussed how emotional problems could increase the likelihood of alcoholism. Especially for Finns, the personal motive behind drinking was closely linked to the risk of dependency later in life. For them, drinking because of sadness or depression was regarded as highly risky:

GR08_FIN_LOW

F2: From my point of view, in ten years she could be someone who spends all her money, probably on drugs.

F1: If she becomes accustomed to that, I mean if she thinks that drinking helps with all her troubles. Then she could become...

F4: She could become an alcoholic.

[clip: my summer of love]

A typical feature in the Finnish data was that with every clip the participants considered if the motive of drinking was negative or positive: having fun with friends was considered an acceptable motive for drinking and was therefore seen as a relatively risk-free way of drinking. However, if the character's mood in clips was interpreted as being somehow troubled, it raised the question of whether the character was likely to become dependent later in life. This shows how, in the Finnish images, the individual motives and competences have a great importance in defining risks of drinking.

Italian interviewees, too, associated drinking because of depression or sad-

ness with the risk of alcoholism, and even considered the most likely reasons behind depression, namely losing a job and the inability to support the family.

GR01_IT_UP

M3: maybe a man has a wonderful family, his wife doesn't work, he loses his job and can no longer support his family, so he gets depressed and becomes an alcoholic

[clip: my summer of love]

Still, in the Italian data a distinction emerged between "drinking for a temporary problem", which is the case of a young person who tries to forget or put away something unpleasant that has just happened, and "drinking because of a disease", which is normally attributed to adults who frequently drink alone and due to a long-term individual psychological condition, such as depression. In both cases the persons are considered "weak", but the first case is considered less risky and judgements are less strict (Petrilli et al., 2013).

Interviewees from Turin also problematised drinking for fun more than did young people from Helsinki, because they associated it with a risk of alcoholism, although it was seen as a behaviour more typical of young people. Such behaviour would normally end when young people grew up and took on the responsibilities of adulthood, namely graduating, working and taking care of the family. In their view this was the normal and right way, while those adults who continued to get drunk were regarded, for example, as homeless people.

GR01_IT_UP

F6: Maybe there are persons who start just for fun but then realise that they are, in a way, addicted, in the sense that they cannot stop. They begin because all the others do it and to have fun, then they cannot help it and get addicted.

M1: After all we have to consider that this is the age when maybe these things happen more often, because maybe when you're 30 and maybe with a job...

F6: Maybe you're adult.

M3: More responsible.

[clip: fucking åmål]

Drinking for social pressure

In addition to drinking because of some emotional problems or having fun, interviewees in both countries discussed risks related to social pressure. As with drinking due to sadness, the interviewees saw that drinking because other people drink or because someone pressures you to drink is an indicator of a personality that is susceptible to alcoholism. For this reason, drinking for social pressure could be seen as a pathway toward alcoholism.

GR08_FIN_LOW

F2: How are the characters in ten years? There's probably the little guy...

M3: They are all alkies!

F2: [LAUGHS] Well with the little guy I think that at first he is not doing so well in his life, but eventually he starts to realise that...

F4: Yeah.

F1: Yeah, and if he's still with those guys he'll try to be like them.

[Clip: mean creek]

GR 05_IT_UP

M5: I will only say that this girl [differently from] the previous child [creek scene] who can be well understood, this girl is a weak person, I think this [...] because in the first scene there was an age difference, but here I see that all the girls are more or less the same age, and then in my opinion she is a weak person who would like to show something to her friends, to be someone else, but in the end she's weak and this is so, and she can't do it
[Clip: fucking åmål]

In both countries the idea surfaced of a “weak personality”, which can lead a person to drink and therefore become an alcoholic, but Italian interviewees took into account that the situation is not necessarily so definitive for a child.

Harmful social environment

The most striking difference between the Italian and Finnish interviewees was found in the ways they talked about social reasons for alcoholism. Surprisingly, the Finnish data contains no mention of social background or environment. In the Italian data, the environment where a person had grown up (family, local context, school and friends) and the educational background of the family were considered important factors affecting the risk of becoming an alcoholic, even more than personal behaviours or consumption habits. Indeed, in their opinion the wrong kind of social background can be the cause of a weak personality susceptible to a higher risk of addiction, because a weak person cannot deal with problems that may occur in adult life. In this frequent image in the

Italian data, alcohol represented a secondary factor behind becoming an addict. A relatively clear image emerged about social factors and how they affect a person's vulnerability to alcoholism.

GR04_IT_UP

F4: [about] ones who, growing up, then become alcoholics, I think they do because they have root problems. It's not that a really normal person becomes an alcoholic only in order to pose [drinking in order to pose, like young people do in her opinion]

M1: Or maybe when you lose your job...

F4: Or [if] during childhood you have problems within the family...

F4: So sometimes the fault is not necessarily either the alcohol or the person, but maybe his parents who haven't given him a good education... or maybe [the fault is] the place where you live, there are places where drug dealers are there, others where there aren't
[...]

M1: In any case we can tell that family education means a lot.

F2: It depends on the friends you've got, on the schools you have attended
[...]

M1: The way you grow up depends on education.

[clip: eurotrip]

While “a normal person” cannot actually become an alcoholic just because of drinking, several events can lead a weak adult to drinking alcohol and becoming addicted, the most cited circumstances having to do with the family. Especially one group in

Italy was focused on adult problems that can indirectly increase the risk of alcoholism, such as divorce or a couple's troubles, often described as gender role problems. Women are still seen as looking after children and taking care of housework – and perhaps becoming frustrated by these duties. Men were seen as breadwinners who may lose their jobs and become desperate when they are no longer able to support their family.

Even though in most cases the family represented a resource and a reason for not drinking, it could also be seen as the source of troubles and as becoming a reason for drinking. What is interesting is that the interviewees did not blame the alcoholic in these cases. In fact they stressed that there were no individual responsibilities, and the “fault” should be attributed to the wider social environment and especially family and education received, as in the previous quotation. Accordingly, the family and the social environment were also considered the best resources of escaping the risk of addiction and of rehabilitation to a “normal” life.

GR_05_IT_LOW

M4: not being pessimistic, instead, what might happen?

F5: changing life

F3: someone rescues her

F5: she may meet someone

[...]

F3: there are also people who just quit drinking

F5: [they say] “I want to live”

F3: and wipe the slate clean

F3: and start a family

F5: a family!

[clip: my summer of love]

Discussion

Our study has sought to show how conceptualisations of alcoholism are bound up with cultural contexts and how they are utilised in order to make everyday observations of problematic behaviour intelligible. We were particularly interested to see if one specific feature of geographies, an individualistic-collectivistic pattern, could explain differences in the alcohol-related understandings that still persist among youth between northern and southern Europe.

Based on our analysis it seems that in both data sets the interviewees were rather conscious about the risks of alcohol and they also discussed the risk of becoming dependent on alcohol. Most of the images emerged in both data sets. Drinking alone as a teenager was considered highly risky in terms of becoming an alcoholic later in life, and the dangers of using alcohol as a tranquilliser or antidepressant were emphasised. These practices were attributed to adults. As youth drinking patterns, they were seen as risky and not typical. The interviewees' discourses sound rather normative, but this is not unexpected, as their own experiences of drinking practices and alcohol-related problems are still few. In both geographies, the interviewees defined the limits of excess and acceptable, cultured drinking. They highlighted specific images about rules of when, where, how much, what and with whom drinking was acceptable. All the transgressions of these rules were seen as a possible sign of alcoholism. Accordingly, in both data alcoholism was used in discussions as a mirror on which acceptable drinking was reflected. In this sense the Italian and Finnish images seemed similar.

Many aspects of the concept of collectivism which refer to familism or family values appear to feed the Italian interviewees' images of alcoholism. The "family" constitutes a constant point of reference in discourses about drinking: it can represent both a reason for not becoming an alcoholic and a reason for starting to drink too much. It is also an important resource for recovery. Starting a family and getting a job were the main future goals among Italian interviewees, while alcoholism was viewed as failing in one's interpersonal responsibilities, or as a consequence of a failure in achieving them. Conversely, the role of the family is insignificant in the Finnish data, and alcoholics were mainly seen as failing to achieve professional goals.

Differences were also evident in the ways the interviewees discussed norms aimed at minimising the risk of alcoholism. In contrast to the detailed discussions of the Italians, the Finnish discussions were less elaborated and argued. While the quantity and frequency of drinking was connected to alcoholism in both data, Finns tended to treat them as matter-of-fact statements. The Italian respondents, on the other hand, distinguished the level of risk based on the different contexts, drinking practices and beverages, underlining also the difference between drinking and getting drunk. In parallel with the images of risky drinking, they also referred to a correct and safe way of drinking. This outcome has also emerged from other comparative group interview studies (Hellman & Rolando, 2013; Rolando et al., 2013). It can therefore be considered a cultural difference rather than a result of a different quality in data collecting.

As for drinking cultures, more complex and detailed system of social norms in the Italian data can be interpreted as a result of a long socialisation process to drinking. During this process, children and teens are at times allowed to taste alcohol but they are also taught how and when drinking is appropriate (Beccaria et al., 2010; Rolando et al. 2012). Moreover, it has been shown that young people's alcohol cultures in Finland are very distant from the adults' world, and teenagers report difficulties in discussing drinking issues with their parents (Jaatinen, 2000). It is as if Finnish parents did not recognise their role as educators in the drinking field. Reasoning in terms of I-C geographies, it seems that young people from southern Europe are on the whole more likely to follow adult norms than are their northern coevals. They are also more willing to attribute greater value to tradition (Dwairy, 2002).

The most striking difference between Italian and Finnish images was the increased Italian emphasis on the social origins of alcoholism and the total absence in the Finnish data of any mention of them. While Finnish interviewees did not mention any considerations of the social environment and background when they pondered the reasons behind alcoholism, in the Italian data the social causes – family, education and living environment as a child – were seen as root causes of alcoholism. The Italian interviewees saw the reasons as embedded in the context in which a person had grown up. From this point of view, the Italian respondents conformed to one aspect of the collectivist pattern, i.e. contextualism, which refers to the belief that context is the main aspect to be considered in understanding human

behaviour and misbehaviour (Owe et al., 2012).

On the other hand, the lack of social reasons in the Finnish data seems to confirm the assumption of individualism in the Finnish images of alcoholism, and is consistent with previous studies according to which alcoholism is seen mainly as a result of one's personal shortcomings and problems (Hirschovits-Gerz, 2013). Likewise, Finnish images also highlighted personal competence: if a person drinks in a right manner and for the right reasons there is no risk of becoming an alcoholic. As a result, in Finland the emphasis on individual competence seems to shift the focus from the context and addictive properties of the substance itself, which are central issues in Italian discourses.

It is possible that the C-I pattern would not emerge as strongly with older interviewees, who have more experience in drinking matters. However, in terms of convergent drinking trends in Europe, our results show how the "roots" of the drinking images among young people are highly influenced by deeper cultural structures of different geographies which are likely to affect the ways young people perceive the role and risks of drinking also later in their lives.

Conclusions

According to our results, it seems that in more collectivistic geographies, i.e. southern Europe, images of alcoholism can be considered more protective than Northern ones, as they 1) emphasise interper-

sonal responsibility, 2) enhance the value of norms and tradition, and 3) highlight causes of alcoholism which are beyond the control of the individual (e.g. contextual, social and inherent in the substance). This makes attitudes towards alcohol more cautious. Conversely, the individualistic trust in an individual's own competence to handle drinking corresponds to a lack of attention on other causes of alcoholism that are beyond personal control. The emphasis on an individual competence is thus likely to be associated with a lower perception about risks of drinking, which can be seen also as a possible explanation for the higher propensity for risk-taking behaviour among young Nordic people.

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